The Master's Friendships

By J. R. Miller, D.D.

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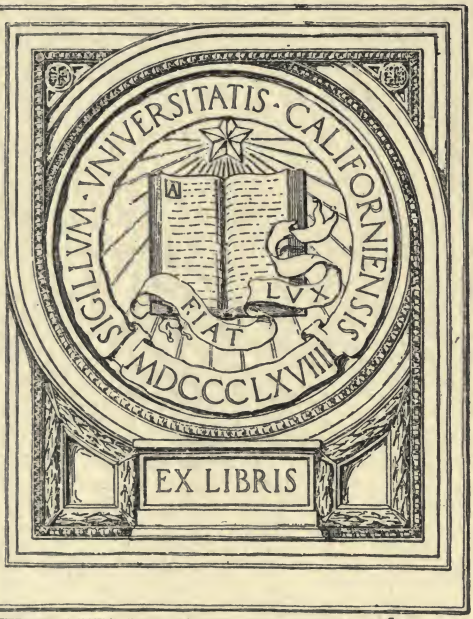

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THE MASTER'S FRIENDSHIPS

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Young Men; Faults and Ideals

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JESUS LOVED MARTHA, AND HER SISTER, AND LAZARUS.

THE MASTER'S FRIENDSHIPS

BY

J. R. MILLER

Author of "Making the Most of Life," etc.

"Ye are my friends"

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THE need of friendship is the deepest need of life. Every heart cries out for it. Perhaps no shortcoming in good lives is so common as the failure to be a friend to those about us. Jesus Christ gave us the pattern for all beautiful life, but in nothing did he show us more plainly and more urgently the way to live than in his wonderful friendliness to man. We begin to be like Christ only when we begin to be a friend to every one.

J. R. M.

PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.

" Behold him now where he comes!
Not the Christ of our subtile creeds,
But the light of our hearts, of our homes,
Of our hopes, our prayers, our needs.
The Brother of want and blame,
The Lover of women and men."

THE MASTER'S FRIENDSHIPS

JESUS was the friendliest man who ever lived in this world. Many human friendships are narrow, exclusive, selfish. Toward a few people they are intense, devoted, loyal, self-denying, wondrously beautiful, but all the rest of the race they shut out. They have no thought of extending the privileges and blessings of their friendship beyond a limited circle. Christ's friendship was broad, generous, unselfish. He wished all men to accept it and to be helped by it.

One of the ancients said that his aim was to have his house by the side of the road and to be a friend to man. It was

thus that Jesus lived. He did not hide away in caves or mountains so that men could not find him. He lived among people. He did not hedge himself about with rules and conventionalities to protect himself from men's intrusions. He was always accessible. He ever sought to be among men and to reach men. He accepted invitations to social functions at men's homes that he might get near to those who needed to be helped.

He was not the friend of a few men, men of education, of culture, of refinement, of rank, of power; he was as easy of approach to the poor, the ignorant, the rude, the obscure, as to the great, the noble. Jesus loved the common people, and went continually among them because they were conscious of their needs and were ready to accept the help he was so eager to give. Indeed, almost no other

kind of people came to him or were numbered among his friends. The proud and exclusive did not want him. To the poor the gospel was preached. Most of his disciples were peasants or lowly ones. He was the friend of men. He lived by the side of the road where the throngs were ever passing, and he was always helping somebody.

Jesus was friendly not only to the good, the respectable, the highly moral, but to the disreputable, the outcast, the fallen. One of the charges brought against him by his enemies was that he was a friend to publicans and sinners. To them, this was grave condemnation. But really this was part of the glory of Christ's life. He said he had come to seek and save the lost, that is, the worst. He spoke of himself as a physician. Think of a physician refusing to go among the sick or to be

their friend. His mission is to those who need him. A minister used to say, "The man who wants me is the man I want." That is what Jesus would have said. He was a friend to men, to every man. He had an errand to every man. He had something he wanted to give to every man, a blessing he wanted to bestow on every one. He loved every man.

A colony has been suggested from which should be excluded all ignorant and vulgar people. That was not the thought of Christ in founding his church. He was not on the quest of pleasure and congeniality when he went among men, but of helpfulness to others, uplifting, the taking of the unworthy, the unholy, the outcast, and making them children of God. Therefore he was a friend to the worst, that he might make them fit to be among the best.

We must remember that Jesus Christ was the revelation of God to men. God could not be understood, coming as a spirit, could not get near to men, could not make himself known to them; so he came in human form, in human flesh, with human touch, human sympathy and human speech. The friendship which Christ offered to men was more than human friendship, even the richest and the best; it was divine friendship, with infinite blessing and good in it.

We think then of Jesus as a friend to men. We speak of friends usually as those with whom we form close and peculiar relations. Every person has one or two or more personal friends who come into the inner circle, who become sharers of the joys and sorrows, the cares, the blessings of his life. We tell young people that they must be most careful in

choosing their friends. They must not offer themselves on every altar. They must not open the door to every one who knocks. Friendship is a most sacred relation. We are to love all men and to seek to do them good, but we are not to be a friend to all in the higher sense, involving intimacy and trust.

In speaking of the friendships of Christ, we must keep in mind this distinction. He also had his near and intimate friends to whom he revealed his whole heart, whom he took into the closest relations. "All things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you," he said to his disciples. In this sense he was exclusive in his friendships, but there was a sense in which he was everybody's friend. The same should be true of all who are the friends of Christ. We are to take into our inner heart those who have

entered into the sacred things of life with us. But we are also to be, like our Master, the friend of every one, ready to do the offices of friendship to all.

As we read the story of our Lord's life, we see him going among people everywhere with heart full of interest and sympathy. Most men are kindly disposed to certain persons, and are willing to do what they can to help them, but they select those to whom they would thus be friendly, and then close their hearts upon others. Christ never shut his heart on any one. He was ready to give love to every one.

It is not always the one who is most congenial who most needs our friendship. It is easy to be a friend to one who is agreeable, who is bright and sunny, who is brilliant and entertaining in conversation, to one who can give as well as

receive. We all enjoy being a friend to such a person. It lays no burden upon us. But are we ready and willing to be a friend to those who are unattractive and uncongenial, even disagreeable, who have nothing to give to us in return, who have only needs, cares and burdens to share with us, to those we have to lift and carry? That is where friendship is tested. We never know when we say to one, "I will be your friend," what this promise is going to cost us before life ends. When a man and a woman at the marriage altar pledge their troth, promising to love and cherish each other till death shall separate them, they do not know what they are promising.

In our common relations in life, what is called friendship does not always mean willingness to be a friend to any one who needs our help, whatever the cost may

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THE PEOPLE WHO FLOCKED TO JESUS WERE POOR, SICK, OR LAME, OR BLIND.

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be. It may, indeed, be only a very narrow, selfish, unworthy thing, not ready to make any sacrifice, to bear even the smallest burden, to endure the least suffering. But with Christ, friendship meant the acceptance of any cost of self-denial, pain, sacrifice, that might be required in doing love's duties. He did not choose to be a friend only to those who would bring delight and cheer to him, who would lighten his burdens, at least who would not make his load heavier. He offered to become a friend to men, regardless of their ability to serve him or to be a comfort to him. His offer of friendship was unlimited, without reserve, universal.

The people who flocked to Jesus were chiefly those who were poor, who were sick or lame or blind, or had some weakness or trouble. Every one of them, even

the unworthiest or the most disagreeable, found in him a friend. He was gracious to them in their distress. Trouble was the key to his heart. He had compassion on grief and want and all kinds of need. This is always true of Christ. He chooses those to whom he will be a friend, and he chooses especially those who need him. Need is always that which attracts his attention.

Mary Lyon, founder of Mt. Holyoke Seminary, used to say to the girls in her graduating classes, "My dear girls, when you choose your fields of labor, go where nobody else is willing to go." One tells of a young man who, at an evening company, selects for his special attentions those to whom no other one is showing attention. He is brilliant himself, the one most sought after by all who are present, but he does not choose to be

with the happy, laughing groups all the evening. Instead, if there is a bashful young fellow in the company, one who cannot make himself attractive to others, or a shy girl who lacks winsomeness and is not sought by others, these are the ones to whom he devotes his first thought and attention. He will show his interest in them, introduce them to others, and stay with them till their strangeness of feeling and their self-consciousness are lost in happy companionship. That is what true human friendship should always do — think of those who most need to be helped or cheered. If there are two homes to which you may go some evening, one where all is gladness and song, and the other in which there is sickness or sorrow, or over which some shadow has fallen, it is easy to know to which home Christ would go if he were

in your place. Need was the lodestone which drew him.

Christ had his special friendships. While he built his house by the side of the road where people were always thronging, and was a friend to all men, eager to help any who needed help, he craved, just as every noble heart craves, a few close personal friends, to whom he gave his affection, in whose love he lived, with whom he shared the most holy intimacies of his heart. While he was always feeding others, he needed himself to be fed. While he poured out love in constant streams to bless those who came to him with their cravings, he needed to have his own heart warmed and filled continually with love's inspirations.

The apostles were chosen by Christ to be with him in the inner circle. He chose them thoughtfully, deliberately,

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TROUBLE WAS THE KEY TO HIS HEART.

carefully. It was after they had been with him as companions and followers for months that he selected the twelve from the larger company of disciples, that he might have them with him all the time. It is said, too, that before he chose them he spent the whole night in prayer. So much depended on this choice, it was so important that no mistake should be made, that he must have his Father's approval of the friends he was to take into his inner life. At no time do we more need divine wisdom in our experience than when we are deciding whether or not we shall accept this or that person as our personal friend. All our future will be affected by the decision and all our life colored by it. Many a career is blighted by a hasty, prayerless choice of a friend.

What Christ was to the twelve as a

friend is theme great enough for a volume. Think, for example, what he was to Peter. Peter came to him, first, a man full of faults, rude, undisciplined, unlettered, rash, and impetuous. Nobody ever thought of the old fisherman as having any promise of beauty or good, or any power or greatness in him. But the moment Jesus saw him he said, "Thou art Simon: thou shalt be called Peter." He saw the possibilities in this man of the fishing-boat — possibilities of large-heartedness, of noble leadership, of great influence, of apostleship. We know what Peter was when Christ was through making him. He is known all over the world to-day. If Christ had not found him, he would never have been anything but Simon, a rough, swearing fisherman, casting his nets for a few years into the Sea of Galilee, then dying unhonored and

being buried in an unmarked grave by the sea. His name never would have been known in the world. Think what Peter is to-day in history, in influence upon the countless millions of lives that have been blessed through him. All this is because Christ found him and became his friend.

Think what Jesus was to John. John was little more than a boy when he first met Jesus that afternoon by the sea. He, too, was a fisherman. We do not know much of his home or family. It is generally supposed that he was of a resentful disposition. He wished to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that refused shelter to Jesus and his disciples. John and his brother James were called Boanerges, "Sons of thunder," the name perhaps indicating the vehemence and the severity of their disposition. Yet

John became the apostle of love. He was the most beloved of all our Lord's disciples. He lay on his breast at the last supper. To him Jesus entrusted his mother when he was dying on the cross. The influence of John in the Christian church is most gentle and softening. Paul has far more to say in his epistles about love than John has in his writings, but the personality of John as it lives to-day in the world has made an atmosphere like that of a genial, fragrant summer, an atmosphere next to that of the Master's own name and life, an atmosphere of sweetness, of love, of tenderness. All this in the John we know the friendship of Christ made in him. John lived near the heart of Christ and the love of that great heart permeated his life and transformed him.

Always the friendship of Christ discovered the best that was in men. He

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JOHN WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A BOY WHEN HE FIRST MET JESUS.

saw possibilities in them that no other one had ever dreamed of. Then he set about to develop these possibilities. We sometimes commit the mistake of trying to make life easy for our friends. We think that is the way to show our best kindness to them. We seek to shelter them from every rough wind. We do things for them to relieve them and to save them from stress and strain. We carry their loads for them. This seems to us to be friendship's sacred duty. But Jesus was wiser than we in his friendships. He was making men, and ofttimes it was better that the stress should not be lessened, the burden not lightened; that the storm should be allowed to blow and the struggle to go on.

> "As the mighty poets take
> Grief and pain to build their song,
> Whatso'er its lot may be, —

Building as the heavens roll,
Something large and strong and free, —
Things that hurt and things that mar
Shape the man for perfect praise;
Shock and strain and ruin are
Friendlier than the smiling days."

Outside the disciple family, Jesus had also other close personal friends. Take the members of the Bethany family for illustration: "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." We never can understand what Jesus was to this home. The record shows us a picture of his first welcome there. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us to be ready to entertain strangers, and then reminds us that in doing so some have hereby entertained angels unawares. Better than this was the outcome of the hospitality of Martha that day when she received Jesus Christ into her home, — she entertained the Son

of God. Mary sat at the feet of this holy Guest and listened to his wonderful talk, and we never can know what those wonderful words meant to Mary's life. They transformed her into marvelous spiritual beauty.

Paul wrote once to some absent friends that he longed to see them, that he might impart to them some spiritual gift. This was a lofty wish of friendship. It suggests what our longing for our meetings with our friends should be. Jesus imparted to Mary the richest spiritual gifts in the visits he made to her. If Christian girls and women knew what this divine Friend has to give to them, and how his words would bless them, they would sit every day at his feet and listen while he talks to them. No other culture is so fine as that which comes from communion with Jesus Christ.

In this home at Bethany we see what Christ's friendship did in the day of sorrow. The brother fell very sick. Jesus was away at the time. A messenger was sent to tell him, "He whom thou lovest is sick." We would suppose that he would start instantly, to get to his friends, in their trouble, at the earliest possible moment, but the record reads strangely indeed: "When therefore he heard that he was sick, he abode at that time two days in the place where he was." "Therefore" — because he loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, he waited two days after hearing of his friend's illness before he started to their home. Notice it was because he loved them that he delayed. Some day when you are in sorrow or trouble and send for Christ, he may delay to come, delay till it seems too late to come at all. Remember, then,

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PETER WAS A ROUGH FISHERMAN.

that it is because he loves you and yours that he delays. We must learn to trust Christ's friendship even when it seems to fail us. We must wait till we see the end of his dealing with us.

The story of this Bethany sorrow, when finished, left no disappointment. The moment Jesus came was just at the right moment. There was no failure in his friendship. He was not indifferent or neglectful when he waited. There was just the same love in his delaying as there was at the last when he came. It will always be so in Christ's dealing with you. Scarcely a day passes but some one speaks of the strange mystery of some sorrow. "How can Christ love me and not come to me with relief in my distress?" He does love you. It is just because he loves you that he does not answer you as you thought he would, — he has a better way.

Then in the end the blessing he gives is far greater than if he had taken your way. We may be glad we don't have to understand.

"In the center of the circle
Of the will of God I stand:
Where can come no second causes,
All must come from his dear hand.
All is well! for 't is my Father
Who my life hath planned.

"Shall I pass through waves of sorrow?
When I know it will be best,
Though I cannot tell the reason
I can trust and so am blest.
God is love, and God is faithful,
So in perfect peace I rest.

"With the shade and with the sunshine;
With the joy and with the pain;
Lord, I trust thee! both are needed
Each Thy wayward child to train.
Earthly loss, did we but know it,
Ofttimes means our heavenly gain."

Some people read the story of the life of Christ as a bit of ancient history. It happened nearly two thousand years ago. They wish that they had lived in that golden age of the world when Jesus was here among men. But this story is far more than a story of the past. And it is just as true to-day as it was then that Christ has his house by the side of the road and is a friend to men. The most wonderful and the most real thing in the world now is the friendship of Christ. We cannot see him. We say, "If I could see him as I see my human friend, I would take him as my friend and trust him." Have you ever thought that human friendship, too, is a matter of faith, not of sight? You cannot see in your friend that which you trust. The qualities in him which mean so much to you are invisible. They are qualities of

his heart. They are not his physical beauty, his culture, his money, his gifts, his position. The things you trust are his truth, his manliness, his honor, his faithfulness, his thoughtfulness, his gentleness, — and you cannot see these. You cannot be with your friend all the while to see with your own eyes that he is always loyal to you. You do not watch your friend to see that he is good and true and faithful wherever he goes. You do not set spies to follow him in all his absences from you. Yet you never doubt him. Evil tongues may whisper foul insinuations about him, but you refuse to believe them. Even if you learn evil things about him, things, too, that appear to be true, you still stand by him. There must be some mistake, you say. These things cannot be true. You believe in your friend and you trust him absolutely.

Your friendship is not of sight, but of faith.

Can we not believe also in the same way in Christ and in his friendships? Can we not love him whom we have not seen? A sorrow comes; you cannot understand it. But why must you understand? Indeed, in almost every case we would be far happier if we did not try to understand things. Dr. Robertson Nicoll says: "There are some very devout people who know far too much. They can explain the whole secret of pain and evil and death in the world. They prate about the mystery of things as though they were God's spies. It is far humbler and more Christian to admit that we do not fully discern a reason and method in this long, slow tragedy of human existence." You remember that Jesus himself said, "I have yet many

things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Some day we shall have all the mysteries made known, but now is it not enough for us to know that Christ is our Friend? He understands. Our lives are safe in his keeping. Nothing ever goes wrong if we are living with him.

We have hints and glimpses in the New Testament story of what Christ's friendship meant to those who accepted it when they knew him as a man, even though there was so much mystery in it, so much that seemed severe, wanting in sympathy, in kindness. In the end all became plain, and then there was love in every line. It is the same to-day.

Let us seek, then, to believe in and realize the friendship of Christ, just as Peter did, just as John did, just as Martha and Mary did. It is as real to us as it

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HE SPENT THE WHOLE NIGHT IN PRAYER.

was to them. The fact that he has passed into heaven does not make his friendship any the less close or tender, nor the less human. It will mean just as much to us as it did to them. What, for example, would Matthew, the publican, ever have been if Christ had not become his friend? Only a hated tax-collector, a sordid, greedy, grasping Jew. Christ made him a man, a big-hearted man, an unselfish, loving man, then an apostle, the writer of a Gospel, whose name shines over all Christendom. The friendship of Christ will make every man who accepts it noble and strong. None will ever reach their best till he lifts them up to it.

As friends and followers of Christ, it is ours to repeat his friendships on the earth, to be to others in our way and measure what he has been to us. We

should build our house by the side of the road where people throng and surge and be a friend to men. They need us — they need love and sympathy and help. The other day a request came from one of our hospitals for the sending of a birthday letter to a nurse. Other friends were also in the secret. The nurse was far from home and was dreadfully homesick. Then in her secluded and narrow circumstances she had never had the opportunity to know the brighter, sweeter things of love, which many Christian women have known in their wider life in the gentle homes of their childhood and girlhood. Everything that thoughtful love could do for this girl was done by the friends who were determined to make the day one she never would forget. Next day she wrote to a friend in glowing words of what her birthday had

been to her in happiness and what it had done for her in the way of love's revealing. She said she could not express her gladness. She had never known before what love meant. That day began a new epoch in her life, something like the new epoch which must have begun in Mary's life the day she sat first at the feet of Jesus and heard his words.

The world is full of people who are just as hungry-hearted as was this child from the South, who know just as little of the sweet and beautiful things of love, and to whom a gracious, cheerful kindness will be a revealing of Christ, which will make all things new for them. Those of us who have been most highly favored, who have known much of love and love's sweet revealings, who have had many friends to brighten our lives in all circumstances, cannot understand the

emptiness of many lives which do not know anything whatever of the meaning of sweet human affection, who really never have had a friend. There are many who have scarcely ever received a real kindness in their whole life. To such it is a holy hour when one says to them, "I am going to be your friend." A teacher said this to a boy who had never heard such a word before. His lot was most dreary. He had been badly treated, receiving only hard knocks, hearing only sharp and bitter words, no one ever having said to him anything gentle. When this teacher, his heart touched by the boy's forlorn loneliness, laid his hand on his shoulder and looking into his sad face, said, "Cheer up, my boy, I am going to be your friend," it was as if Christ himself had spoken to him. A new light flashed into the boy's face as

he looked up eagerly a little later and said, "Did you mean what you said to me a moment ago — that you would be my friend? If you are going to be my friend, I can be a man." That was what the friendship of Christ meant to his disciples, and there are many people all about us, to whom we can bring uplifting, widening, and enlarging of life, and for whom we can make the world new simply by becoming their friend.

There are certain times when our friends are apt to think there is no need for their keeping near us or letting us know they think of us or remember us. "Friendship will shine out when the roads are rough, and the fare is scant, and the winds are chill, and the great, hard desolation settles down upon life. Then friendship is the stay and furtherance of the soul." But there come times in our

lives when we seem to have no need. All things are bright about us, there are no shadows over us, we have no trouble, and we are not in any distress. Our friends are as true and faithful to us then as ever, but they do not come to us with assurance of friendship, with sympathy or with help, — there seems no need. But really we need our friends then too, — we need them at all times. There is never a day when it will not do us good to have our friends tell us of their love and stand close to us in gentle affection. The common saying is, "A friend in need is a friend indeed," but there is always need for friendship. Henry Van Dyke puts it well: —

"A friend in need," my neighbor said to me —
"A friend, indeed, is what I mean to be:
In time of trouble I will come to you,
And in the hour of need you 'll find me true."

I thought a bit, and took him by the hand:
"My friend," said I, "you do not understand
The inner meaning of that simple rhyme —
A friend is what the heart needs all the time."

Every day, every hour, is a time of need with us. We may not need certain forms of actual help all the while, but there is never a time when we do not need love, sympathy, cheer; when we do not need to be thought about, when we do not need the consciousness of one standing by. It is not material help that ordinarily means most to us; it is the knowledge that we have the friend, that he is ours and that he will be ready and true, that, turn to him when we may we shall always find him close beside us, strong and wise, a rock in the weary land. Many of the sweetest and truest manifestations of friendship are made in almost imperceptible ways — a look, a smile,

some simple thoughtfulness, an expression of sympathy which is scarcely conscious, a kindness done in silence, without any mention. Ofttimes friendship's best service is rendered when there would seem to be no need. Destinies have been changed by a word or a kindness when all seemed bright. It is thus the friendship of Christ serves us, not only when we are crying for help, but also when we seem to have all things, lacking nothing.

The friendship of Christ never fails. Much of the failure of human friendship is negative — in not doing the things that ought to have been done. We are not unkind to our friends, but we are not kind. We do nothing to harm them, but neither do we do the things which would do them good. "I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; . . . I was

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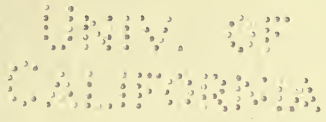
THE LIGHT OF OUR HEARTS, OF OUR HOMES.

a stranger, and ye took me not in." We remember that most pathetic experience of Christ's, when his heart hungered for the love and sympathy his friends could have given him, but failed to give. Again and again he came to them in his agony and found them asleep. Do our friends in hours of bitterness and longing for love ever come to us hoping for sympathy, and find us sleeping? Or do those who are to us God's angels of ministering love, year after year, fail of appreciation by us till they have finished their serving of us and slipped away? Life for all of us is full of opportunities for being kind, for showing the friendship of Christ, but how many of us fail to note the opportunities, to understand the needs, the heart-hungers, and to be the friend in need!

There is a personal question which concerns every one of us. "Do you

know the friendship of Christ?" He is your friend — no other human being is to you the friend Christ is. He loves you, he knows your needs, he longs to help you. He longs to save you from your faults, he longs to make your life mean more to you. He stands at the door of your heart and knocks, and wants to enter in to fill you with love. Do you know Christ as your friend? Into your life have come human friendships which have meant a great deal to you. Some one asked Charles Kingsley the secret of his life of beauty, of love of gentleness, of service. He answered, "I had a friend." Have you not had a friend, a rare human friend, who has enriched your life in countless ways? Do you know the friendship of Jesus Christ as you know that of this human friend?

"One there is above all others
Well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free and knows no end."



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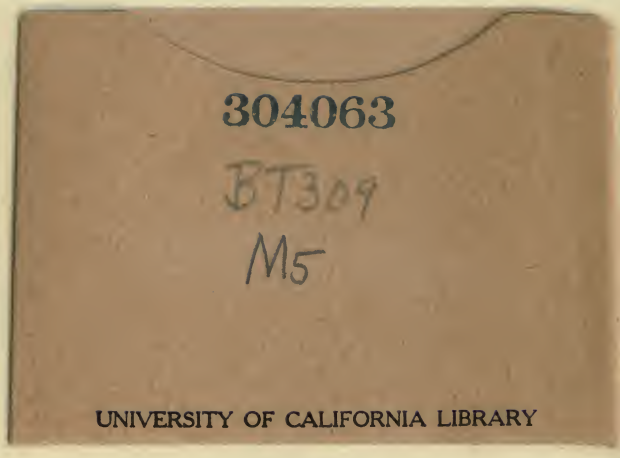
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